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Riviera Club Destroyed by Fire, PV Brush Blaze Imperils Homes



CLUB FIRE—Firemen are battling the flames sweeping out of the Hollywood Riviera Club, which was destroyed in an early-morning blaze Thursday. Ten fire companies from Torrance and Redondo Beach fought the fire, which broke out in the cocktail bar of the establishment. Cause of the fire is still under investigation.



PROBE CAUSE—Investigators under direction of Sgt. Hatcher of the sheriff's arson squad, dig rubble of club house to seek clues to the cause of the disastrous fire.

Investigators Probe Cause of Dawn Blaze

A thorough investigation into the disastrous fire which destroyed the once swank Hollywood Riviera Club early Thursday morning, will not be completed for several days.

Arson investigators from the Torrance Fire Department and the Sheriff's Department spent the entire day combing the rubble for causes of the early morning blaze, which gutted the landmark of the Roaring 20's.

Fire Chief J. J. Benner, who directed six Torrance and four Redondo Beach companies in fighting the holocaust, estimated

damage to the structure at a minimum of \$120,000. Loss of contents is expected to bring the final figure over the \$200,000 mark.

Mixed Reaction
Immediate reaction to the fire was one of mixed emotions.

While some residents regretted loss of the landmark of never-filled promises, others were jubilant over the destruction of the place which had led to numerous complaints over late hour jam sessions and unruly patrons in recent months.

The fire also ended plans for the joint purchase of the property at 201 Paseo de la Playa by Torrance and Redondo Beach for use as a youth center.

But Mayor Albert Isen, who had suggested the idea, said that it might be possible to ask the county to develop it as a regional recreation center.

Starts in Bar

The fire was reported at 3:25 a.m. after it broke out in the cocktail bar in the northwest corner of the building. From there it swept through the southern part of the building, including the 40-foot tower.

Several residents of the club fled their rooms in night apparel, and no one was reported hurt in the blaze.

Norton Wisdom, who holds the lease on the building and who has recently been the target of official criticism for his operations, was not at the club, when the fire broke out, but returned shortly afterward.

Club Residents

Among those who resided on the club premises were Julie Hayes, a hostess, Robert Higgins, 49, Burt Noel and Harry Schaffer.

Wisdom reportedly was at his new night club, the Club Royal, in Hollywood, when the fire broke out, as was Mrs. Nancy LaRu, who lists herself as secretary-treasurer of the leasing organization.

After the blaze was contained, the tower, which contained a hideaway which could be entered by a trap-door, was still standing. It was jerked down Thursday afternoon, when firemen pulled a supporting column with a fire engine as a safety measure.

The investigation was headed by Sgt. Ed Hatcher of the Sheriff's arson squad, who said that he would not be able to give a report until an extensive probe has been completed.

'Beat' Crowd

A huge crowd, including "beat generation" characters, gathered around the scene and Torrance and Redondo Beach police had some difficulty in keeping them a safe distance from the fire.

One man, Jarad P. Morrison, 19, of 300 Paseo de la Playa, was booked on a charge of failing to obey a police officer at the scene of a fire, when he assertedly refused to follow orders to move back. He was arrested by Officer Jim Kirby.

The club is technically owned by the Hollywood Riviera Community Association and the Huntington Land Co., with the latter managing it.

Hold Membership

As originally conceived by Clifford Reid, developer of the area, each lot owner in Hollywood Riviera held a membership in the association, which also owned the club house.

The developer envisioned the club house as a luxurious operation for its members, but the depression foiled his plans.

The Huntington Land Co., which sold the land to Reid, took over the club and leased it to various operators, most of whom failed financially.

Wisdom, the present lessor, reportedly pays a \$700 monthly lease, and had approximately six years to go on his 10-year pact.

Building officials said that since the place will require more than 50 per cent alteration, it will presumably have to be razed completely before it can be rebuilt.

Swanky Houses Saved

One hundred firemen battled a wind-fanned brush fire in Palos Verdes Thursday evening, successfully saving 25 luxurious homes from destruction.

For a time the flames threatened the exclusive residential area near Malaga Cove, but residents assisted the fight by hosing down their houses to prevent structural loss.

More than 100 acres were burned by the fire, which was whipped by an ocean breeze.

Teenagers assisted the fight by digging trenches and manning garden hoses.

Firemen from Palos Verdes, the county, Torrance and beach cities joined in the four-hour battle to stop the flames.

Firemen believe the brush fire was started by a careless motorist who might have flipped out a cigarette.

Among the homes which were in the path of the fire were those owned by opera star Dorothy Kirsten, Joseph Szegli, famed violinist and Dr. John E. French, chief of the neuro-surgical staff of the UCLA Medical Center.

At least three persons were injured in the fire.

Patricia Webb, of 1025 Via Nogales, was hurt when she fell from the roof of her house while trying to wet it down with a garden hose.

Two youths from the County Road Camp suffered were also hurt.

Rent Cut Sought From City

Final decision in the amount of rent to charge for a choice location at Torrance Municipal Airport will be made Tuesday.

Informally, councilmen have indicated they will turn down the Sidney Hodemaker, owner of Hody's restaurant chain, on his request to trim down the \$600 a month rent.

Herbert Albright, representative for the restaurateur, asked that the rent, which is to go from \$175 to \$600 a month as of Oct. 1, should be reduced, since construction on the eating place has not yet been started.

The Council pointed out that the city has already given a six-month extension to April 1, on the completion date of the cafe, and that the pact is three years old.

Several Council members are also miffed at Hodemaker because the proposed restaurant at Crenshaw blvd. and Pacific Coast hwy. will not be as large as had originally been planned.

Albright said the size reduction was due to changes in plans for the Airport Triangle Shopping Center across the street.

SAVES COUNTY MONEY

An upsurge in money-saving suggestions has resulted since he gave a talk on the program, Charles Deck of Torrance, member of the County Suggestion Award Board, announced.



ON THE FIRE LINE—Residents, including teenagers, helped 100 firemen in putting out a brush fire which erupted in the Malaga Cove area of the Palos Verdes Peninsula Thursday evening. Although 25 luxurious homes were threatened by the fire, they all escaped destruction. Press Photo by Milt Svensk

Service to Hill Home Is Steep

Water officials were instructed to come in Tuesday with a recommendation to serve a solitary hillside house with municipal service.

Water Superintendent Angus McVicar reported last week that in order to serve the one house now nearing completion at 24648 Hawthorne blvd., it will cost the department approximately \$8300.

But a spokesman for Mrs. Gwen Bartlett, owner of the house, said that the city has a duty to supply all residents within its district with water, regardless of the costs.

Pressure Pump

The assertion was made by Al Gianni, who described himself as a friend of the owner.

Last week McVicar said in a report that Mrs. Bartlett could install a service on Newton st., and by means of a pressure tank and pump, could bring water to her home at the cost of \$600.

But if the city were to do the job, it would require 700 feet of pipe, a pneumatic tank and two pumps, with the total to cost \$8300.

"I know of at least two people who would develop their property there if they had water," declared Councilman J. A. Beasley. "Something should be done to give the people service."

Need Plans

Councilman Robert Jahn observed that he agrees with McVicar, but since other lots will be developed in the area, a system should be designed to serve that section.

"There's a lot of buck passing, they'll have to do something anyway," asserted Gianni. "The city wants to buy up private companies, but doesn't have enough to serve this area."

McVicar said that the cost of serving the one house would be far more than the revenue obtained even though a few more homes might be built immediately.

POOL WORK SHELVED

Decision on a recommendation to spend \$17,000 for improvements at the Benstead Swimming Pool was postponed for two weeks by the City Council.



THE OTHER SIDE—This part of the building, which contained the bar and dance floor, received the heaviest damage in the fire. Blaze broke out in northwest corner of the club house and spread south, destroying more than 50 per cent of the club, which was designed as a luxury spot during the 1920s.